Designing New Accountability, Recognition, and Improvement Practices for Washington's Public Education System

(Discussion Draft 2)

This document reports on a preliminary step in the State Board of Education's (SBE) effort to lead the development of more effective, robust, and aligned practices of education accountability, recognition, and continuous improvement in Washington. Below is an explanation of the purpose of this effort and the process SBE is using.

Purpose

The intent of this work is to redesign the Washington School Improvement Framework with opportunity-to-learn measures that better support our state's accountability and recognition system of continuous improvement in k–12 education. Washington's SBE seeks to better align what the state measures in its accountability and recognition processes with both the ambitious educational goals the state has set for its education system and the best available evidence about how to achieve those goals effectively and equitably. The redesign is not an effort to reframe education in Washington but, rather, to provide tools that the SBE and its educational partners at every level of the system can use to inform policies and practices for achieving those goals as well as to monitor the state's progress toward them. Rather than focusing only on the extent to which a limited set of student outcome goals are being met, as past systems have done, the new approach will provide cohesive information about the resources being provided, how students are experiencing learning, and students' progress toward more robust and meaningful outcome measures at the building, district, and state levels. These measures will help educators assess how things are working and how well students are learning and will help identify what actions are needed to ensure that students have sufficient learning opportunities and that the system is operating effectively and equitably. Specifically, these practices will help the state support students to better meet the state's basic k–12 education goals, ensure high expectations for all students and give all students the opportunity to achieve personal and academic success, and create a public school system that is increasingly able to evolve and adapt in order to better focus on strengthening the educational achievement of all students.

Approach

The design approach the SBE is taking includes four key steps.

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Model the public education system's theory of action	Identify key indicators and metrics	Identify levels for reporting	Create processes to support using data to improve

The first is to construct a model that makes explicit the goals Washington has set for the educational system and the state's theory of how the system can meet those goals. The model doesn't provide a comprehensive depiction of the education system but instead identifies key features that make the system effective and equitable. Both the goals and key features are articulated in statute and other policy documents; most are supported by considerable education research. Pulling them together into a model will allow the SBE and its partners to focus on what matters most.

The second step is to identify what indicators—measures of the goals and the key features identified in the model—should be selected. This requires research and informed decision-making. Outcome indicators should reflect the full set of basic education goals, knowing that traditional achievement test scores are insufficient. Working backward, indicators of key system features must be identified and verified as evidence based. "Evidence based" means that education research confirms that these indicators are linked to the outcomes the system seeks to achieve. It is also important to assess the feasibility of various indicators by inventorying the valid and reliable measures Washington and other states have used and by taking stock of statewide data already available. In cases where valid and reliable measures or data are not available, the state must decide whether it should develop new measures to generate sufficient useful information. These processes will enable the SBE and its partners to assemble a focused set of key indicators and data that, together, can be used to assess the health of the k–12 education system and to inform its continuous improvement.

A third step is to determine how to report and communicate the indicators to maximize their usefulness for improvement, as well as how to monitor them. Past systems have focused almost exclusively on the school level of reporting, with data disaggregated by significant subgroups of students. However, more useful is a multilevel, shared approach that reports indicators at whichever level of the system has responsibility for the key elements and the capacity to make improvements. For example, having a sufficient and diverse supply of well-prepared and experienced teachers at a school is positively linked with valued outcomes. However, state policies and local district practices, rather than actions at the school, largely determine the supply and distribution of teachers among schools. Therefore, in addition to reporting teacher-quality indicators for each school, indicators of quality and distribution should be reported at the district level and statewide.

A final step in developing the system is creating a supportive process in which the accountability indicators can be used to inform continuous improvement of policies, programs, practices, and partnerships at schools and districts as well as systemwide. Each of these steps requires the engagement of key k–12 education stakeholders.

Washington State Board of Education Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision: The Washington SBE envisions an education system in which students are engaged in personalized education pathways that prepare them for civic engagement, careers, postsecondary education, and lifelong learning.

Mission: The SBE's mission is to provide transparent leadership in k–12 education policymaking, effective oversight of schools serving Washington k–12 students, and assertive advocacy for students' personal growth and success. These three areas of responsibility will support a system that personalizes learning for each student and values diverse cultures, abilities, and learning styles.

Values:

- *Equity* is a primary consideration in our policymaking, initiatives, actions, and interactions. The SBE has adopted an Equity Statement of Intent (included below), and we actively seek to identify and remove barriers that inhibit equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities.

- *Student-Focused Education*: Provide educational, social, emotional, and mental health supports for the whole child. Enact policies that benefit our students, and modify or eliminate policies that are not beneficial. Create meaningful opportunities to hear from and respect diverse student voices. Build authentic, caring relationships with students. Empower students to lead their own learning, and provide personalized learning that is relevant to students.

- *Strategic Action*: Enact impactful, sustainable, research-based initiatives to fulfill our mission and vision. Support an innovative and adaptive system that meets the needs of individual students.

- *Dynamic and Future-Focused Innovation*: Think, plan, and lead proactively. Anticipate the needs of our students and society. Employ research-based strategies. Encourage schools to innovatively cultivate student achievement and the development of transferable skills for a changing workplace. Recognize the changes in our students' needs, and change the system accordingly.

- *Collaboration, Caring, and Inclusion*: Engage and collaborate with partners to achieve shared goals. Value, listen, and learn from all voices. Intentionally seek the wisdom of students, families, and communities, particularly those historically marginalized by the educational system, to inform policies and practices.

- *Integrity*: Act with honesty, professionalism, and transparency. Fulfill our commitments in a fair and ethical manner.

An Effective and Equitable Education System in Washington: Goals and Key Features

Goals

Students should meet the state's basic k–12 goals as established by the legislature in RCW 28A.150.210 and have the knowledge and skills essential for postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship. According to the statute, "The goals of each school district, with the involvement of parents and community members, shall be to provide opportunities for every student to develop the knowledge and skills essential to:

1. Read with comprehension, write effectively, and communicate successfully in a variety of ways and settings and with a variety of audiences;

2. Know and apply the core concepts and principles of mathematics; social, physical, and life sciences; civics and history, including different cultures and participation in representative government; geography; arts; and health and fitness;

3. Think analytically, logically, and creatively and integrate technology literacy and fluency as well as different experiences and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems; and

4. Understand the importance of work and finance and how performance, effort, and decisions directly affect future career and educational opportunities."[1]

The public school system should evolve and adapt in order to better focus on strengthening the educational achievement of all students, which includes high expectations for all students and gives all students the opportunity to achieve personal and academic success, as articulated in RCW 28A.150.210.[2]

Equity Statements

The Washington SBE uses equity as a guiding principle in carrying out its statutory charges, strategic planning, and policymaking. The SBE believes that the state's school system exists to empower all students and to ensure they are ready to become productive, caring, and civically engaged community members. The SBE is committed to successful academic attainment for all students. It will require narrowing the opportunity and academic achievement gaps between the highest- and lowest-performing students and eliminating the predictability and disproportionality in student outcomes by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic conditions. To accomplish this, the SBE will work collaboratively and transparently with educational and community partners to:

- ensure that equity in education is understood as a process to identify and eliminate institutional policies, practices, and barriers that reinforce and contribute to predictably disparate educational outcomes;

- honor and actively engage Washington's underserved communities as partners in developing and advocating for equity-driven policies, practices, and resources that meet the needs of all students; and

- use equity as a lens to continuously assess and improve the collective process of policymaking to ensure our school system's commitment and ability to meet the needs of all students—today and into the future.[3]

Equity in the public school system goes beyond equality. As defined by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, equity means that each student, family, and community is seen to possess strengths and cultural knowledge that benefit peers, educators, and schools. It requires education leaders to examine the ways current policies and practices result in disparate outcomes for students of color, students living in poverty, students receiving special education and English learner services, students who identify as LGBTQ+, and students who are highly mobile. It also requires education leaders to develop an understanding of historical contexts; engage students, families, and community representatives as partners in decision-making; and actively dismantle systemic barriers, replacing them with policies and practices that ensure all students have access to the instruction and support they need to succeed in our schools.[4]

Model With Key System Features

INPUTS		IMPLEMENTATION		RESULTS		
Resources and support from the state and district		**Strategies** (What policymakers and educators can do)	**Outputs** (What can be observed)	**Short-term benefits** for students and schools	**Medium-term impacts** for students and schools	**Long-term impacts** for graduates and Washington
State	District	School	School	Students and schools	Students and schools	Graduates and state
Funding • Ample funding equitably distributed to meet the needs of all students, including those furthest from opportunity[5] • Sufficient funding to address learning barriers for all students, including students from low-income families, students with disabilities, and English learners[6] • Universal access to high-quality early childhood education that prepares students for kindergarten[7]	**Funding** • Equitable allocation of school funding that takes student needs into account[8] • Appropriate materials, staff, and facilities for learning[9] **Assessment/ Accountability** • Data system and program evaluation to inform continuous improvement efforts[30] • A focus on closing opportunity gaps as part of school and district improvement[31] **Educators** • Equitable distribution of well-prepared and experienced educators[34]	**School Climate Strategies** • Adopt a whole child focus—including integrated student supports[10] • Expand resources, tools, curricula, and training to foster positive school and classroom climates[11] • Use structures such as advisory systems, teaching teams that share students, or teacher looping with the same students[12] • Provide expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities (before/after school and summers)[13] • Adopt trauma-informed practices[14] • Use positive and restorative school discipline—e.g., social and emotional learning, restorative justice, and asset-based youth development[15]	**School Climate Outputs** • Students and educators participate in expanded learning time and opportunities (before/after school and summers)[16] • Students and educators participate in integrated student supports—physical health, mental health, and tutoring—with community partners[17] • Students experience fewer exclusionary discipline incidents[18] **Educator Output** • Fewer reports of educator chronic absenteeism • Lower levels of educator stress[32] • Increased educator retention[33]	**School Climate** • Safer, more inclusive school environments with increasingly positive school climates and cultures[19] • Increased student sense of belonging (feeling safe and supported at school)[20] • Increased mutually respectful and trusting interactions among students, educators, families, and community partners[21] • Fewer student behavioral incidents[22] • Reduced demographic disparities in disciplinary practices[23]	**Progress in Learning** • Demonstrative student progress toward meeting Washington's basic education goals[24] • Increased student completion of pathways and graduation requirements and successful transitions from high school to postsecondary education after high school • Decreased demographic disparities in success—e.g., meeting academic standards; graduating; enrolling in and completing college; excelling in high-quality postsecondary pathways (e.g., apprenticeships, internships, industry-recognized credentials); and seeking and maintaining gainful employment[25]	**Educated Graduates** • Read with comprehension, write effectively, and communicate successfully in a variety of ways and settings and with a variety of audiences[26] • Know and apply the core concepts and principles of mathematics; the social, physical, and life sciences; civics and history, including different cultures and participation in a representative government; geography; arts; and health and fitness[27] • Think analytically, logically, and creatively, and integrate technology literacy and fluency as well as different experiences and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems[28] • Understand the importance of work and finance and how performance, effort, and decisions directly affect future career and educational opportunities[29]

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Resources and support from the state and district		Strategies (What policymakers and educators can do)	Outputs (What can be observed)	Short-term benefits for students and schools	Medium-term impacts for students and schools	Long-term impacts for graduates and Washington
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Assessment/ Accountability • High-quality assessments of growth and progress on academic and other outcomes and indicators[35] • Indicators of opportunity gaps as part of school and district improvement[36] • School climate measures used to evaluate student, family, and teacher experiences within a school community[37] • A data system with reporting to support continuous school and district improvement[38] **Educators** • Sufficient supply of well-prepared, diverse, culturally responsive, and stable educators[a] and support providers (e.g., educational staff associates)[63]	**Goals and Standards** • Use and/or develop standards for and ensure the high quality of pathways to college, career, and civic readiness[39] • Provide a rich curriculum in a broad course of study (e.g. math, English language arts, science, civics and history, world languages, visual and performing arts, physical education, etc.)[40] **Instructional Support** • Instructional time sufficient for students to achieve basic education goals and complete graduation requirements[60] • Policies and procedures in place that guide the selection and adoption of unbiased instructional materials for use in classrooms[61] • Time and resources for educators to collaborate, innovate, and proactively utilize professional development opportunities[62]	**Educator Support Strategies** • Ensure strong school leadership[41] • Establish educator professional learning communities with opportunities to collaborate and strengthen instructional efficacy[42]	**Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Outputs** • Instructional time (in classrooms and expanded learning opportunities) provides robust support for students to grow academically, socially, and emotionally[43] • Learning activities are active, engaged, and motivating and support understanding and applying complex content knowledge to new contexts[44] • Learning activities build on cultural and linguistic assets[45] • Assessment activities mirror and assess active, engaged learning[46] • Students have a "high school and beyond plan"—engaged in personalized pathways[47]	**Educator Engagement** • Increased job satisfaction, fewer reports of stress, and increased retention[48] • Increased positive perceptions of students, families, and the school community[49] **Engagement in Learning** • Increased student attendance[54] • Increased participation in expanded learning opportunities[55] • Increased student engagement, inclusion, and participation in learning[56] • Increased student satisfaction with learning pathways[57]	**Educator Engagement** • Sustained increases in job satisfaction, decreases in reports of stress, and increases in retention[50] • Sustained increases in positive perceptions of students, families, and the school community[51] **Family and Community Engagement** • Sustained authentic family and community engagement and participation at school[58] • Sustained increase in families' sense of belonging at the school[59]	**An Effective and Equitable System** • A public school system that is able to evolve and adapt to better focus on strengthening the educational achievement of all students[52] • Equity in the public school system that goes beyond equality[53]

[a] For the purposes of this document, "educators" refers to pre-k–12 teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and other instructional staff determined necessary to meet the state's educational goals.

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Goals and Standards • Goals and standards that are clear, culturally affirming, focused on higher-order thinking and performance skills, and inclusive of social and emotional learning[64] • Multiple high-quality college- and career-ready pathways to a high school diploma, including early-college and linked learning pathways that can give students a start on college coursework and credentials while in high school[65]	**Family and Community Relations** • Collaborative relationships and active partnerships between districts and community leaders, with particular attention to representation and views from historically underserved populations—including tribes[66] • An equity policy that includes procedures for family and community engagement and anti-racism training for school board members and school and district staff[67]	**Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Strategies** • Align curricula with goals and standards and assessments for learning that are culturally affirming, focused on higher-order thinking and performance skills, and inclusive of social and emotional learning[68] • Align instruction with the key lessons from the science of learning and development about how students learn best[69] • Differentiate instruction to meet heterogeneous student learning needs[70] • Provide culturally affirming and linguistically responsive instruction[71] • Provide supplemental instruction and services for English learners, students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster youth[72]	**Family and Community Engagement Outputs** • Family, caregivers, and community members play a significantly greater role in local school decision-making[73]	**Family and Community Engagement** • Increase in authentic family, caregiver, and community partner engagement and participation at school[74] • Increase in families' sense of belonging at the school[75]		**Engagement in Learning** • Increased enrollment and reduced demographic disparities in 3- and 4-year-old participation in early childhood education[76] • Increased enrollment and reduced demographic disparities in students' on-track progression from kindergarten to graduation[77] • Increased student participation and reduced demographic disparities in pathways that prepare students for a full range of postsecondary options—higher education, gainful employment, and civic engagement[78] • Increased student participation and reduced demographic disparities in completion of advanced courses, honors programs, and college preparatory classes[79] • Reduced demographic disparities in special education

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Instructional Support • Up-to-date curriculum frameworks and materials aligned with standards[80] • Universal access to broadband and devices for online learning[81] • Professional learning, including pre-service as well as in-service, that focuses on learning rather than just traditional provision of professional development for all school staff working with youth—including opportunities to build academic and content expertise and to deliver instruction that incorporates social and emotional learning—and that is trauma informed, antiracist, and culturally responsive[82] **Places of Learning** • Provide up-to-date infrastructure and facilities designed to foster student engagement[86] • Provide the personnel, training, and physical spaces needed to create safe and inclusive learning environments[87]		**Family and Community Engagement Strategies** • Provide welcoming, ongoing, and inclusive family, caregiver, and community engagement and partnership opportunities[83] • Use Washington's Integrated Student Supports Protocol to partner with community-based providers and providers of wraparound supports and to contribute to other community school initiatives[84]				**A Better Washington** • Graduates become responsible and respectful global citizens • Graduates contribute to their economic well-being and that of their families and communities • Graduates explore and understand different perspectives • Graduates enjoy productive and satisfying lives[85]

Policy Context and External Factors Mediating Washington's Model of an Effective and Equitable Education System

Policy Context

2021 State Legislative Budget Priorities

- **Empower All Schools to Support the Whole Child** by modernizing school funding, increasing school staffing, supporting the safety and social-emotional needs of all students, implementing multi-tiered systems of support, and expanding educator access to professional learning.

- **Support Students and Their Families** by closing the digital divide in k–12 and by increasing statewide capacity to navigate the special education system.

- **Expand Access to Supports Aligned With Student Interests** by modernizing curricula and creating the learning spaces needed for STEM and career and technical education (CTE) programs.

- **Create and Maintain Safe Learning Environments** by safely retrofitting and renovating school buildings, creating more equitable access to financial resources.[88]

State Legal Protections

- According to the Washington Supreme Court, "It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, color, cast or sex." The Supreme Court has also confirmed that Article IX, Section 1, "confers on children in Washington a positive constitutional right to an amply funded education."[89]

Key Stakeholder Considerations

- The Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) is committed to alleviating "opportunity gaps"[b] and other structural inequities, institution-alized racism, and inequitable educational opportunities by identifying and dismantling discriminatory and disparate laws, policies, and practices that affect students of color.[90]

- The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) holds that equity goes beyond equality; it requires education leaders to examine the ways current policies and practices[c] result in disparate outcomes for students of color, students living in poverty, students receiving special education and English learner services, students who identify as LGBTQ+, and students who are highly mobile.[91]

External Mediating Factors

COVID-19, Racial Injustice, and Economic Insecurity

- We as a nation are in the midst of a well-documented intersection of three life-changing crises. The intersection of incidences of and protests against racial injustice, a fragile economy, and a global health emergency are causing severe problems in all aspects of life, but none greater than in the educational system. The pandemic has been a wake-up call to education policymakers and represents an opportunity to transform Washington's education system into an institution serving every student equitably.[92]

Family and Community Resources and Relationships

- "Educational research clearly shows that parental and home characteristics are correlated with children's educational outcomes."[93] In addition, students with access to positive relationships with adults, social and emotional support, and health care are more likely to succeed at school.[94]

Historically Underserved Communities

- Students in communities of concentrated poverty and/or with a history of racial isolation and discrimination are likely to have barriers to learning that stem from these adverse out-of-school conditions. In addition, "research in the field of opportunity mapping has documented the relationships between education, neighborhoods, access to healthy food, and crime-free environments. Other research in the field holds that job accessibility, school quality, safety, housing, neighborhood satisfaction, and social network all have roles in providing opportunities or benefits for the residents. The thesis is that the state or neighborhood in which you live determines the quality of school a person attends, a person's employment options, and access to health care."[95]

Homelessness and Foster Care

- Students experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity—in foster care, in rural and remote locations, and in low-income families—have difficulty accessing the high-speed internet and devices necessary to obtain synchronous remote instruction. The provision of other supports has been delayed, if not halted altogether. This decreased accessibility and access to supports will undoubtedly result in gaps in academic development that we will not know the full extent of for some time.

[b] The term "opportunity gap" refers to systemic inequities that structurally disadvantage the experience and the opportunities of students of color in the public education system. The design of the educational system created the gaps, and bold systemic changes are needed to reduce or eliminate the gaps.

[c] The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction holds that equity requires education leaders to develop an understanding of historical contexts; engage students, families, and community representatives as partners in decision-making; and actively dismantle systemic barriers, replacing them with policies and practices that ensure all students have access to the instruction and support they need to succeed in our schools.

Notes on Terms

Continuous Improvement: Research shows that organizations improve when people in them have opportunities to gain knowledge and skill and to work with others to achieve quality. This supportive accountability approach is designed to collect comprehensive data that can be used to pinpoint real-time problems and inform solutions that are consistent with long-term goals. The underlying assumption is that *continuous improvement* requires comprehensive and diagnostic data beyond test scores, together with support that *engages* educators and policymakers (at all levels) in understanding and using these data, to make the education system better. "Continuous improvement" is a cyclical process intended to help groups of people at many levels of the education system—from families and schools to state agencies—identify shortcomings, set goals, detect ways to improve, and evaluate change. By "engages," we mean that all actors in the system learn from and act on diagnostic and summative data provided by the accountability system rather than awaiting judgment in the form of annual scorecards or grades designed to make schools, teachers, and students "try harder."[96]

Stakeholders: Building on the work of the Council of Chief State School Officers and Partners for Each and Every Child, the stakeholders mentioned above are intended to represent a broad coalition of members helping to build a more equitable education system in Washington. In the context of this document and the decision-making process to improve it over time, stakeholders include students, families, caregivers, educators, leaders, support staff, and all community members who are involved and invested in districts, schools, programs, and outcomes for students.[97]

Endnotes

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